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Discloses data from a national sample of 2,800 families taken in 1960 by the Survey Research Center Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan on parents' aspirations for the education of their children. Circumstances affecting educational expectations of parents are reviewed and related to parental choice of colleges and attitudes towards public education.

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College Aspirations and the Future Demand for Higher Education

By WILBUR J. COHEN*

FORMAL EDUCATION is the major dynamic mechanism by which economic opportunity is passed on from one generation to the next, or by which intergenerational changes take place. Information on parents' aspirations for educating their children provides a basis for estimating future demand for educational facilities and the potential changes in our society from one generation to the next.

Included in a recent study by the Survey Research Center Institute for Social Research of the University of Michigan was a survey of the aspirations of today's parents for their children's education.[1] The following are some of the highlights of the study report.

- The most important determinants of parents' aspirations for the education of their children are the education of the parents themselves and their current income. While aspirations determined by these two factors, education and income, generally result in the transmission of educational status from one generation to the next, other factors such as number of children in a family may influence this transmission and result in higher or lower status. The expectations of today's parents for sending children to college indicate a potentially substantial improvement in educational status of the next generation.
- The realism of families' educational plans can be assessed by comparing them with their financial resources. Some families with aspirations for higher education are found at income levels which may not permit financing higher education unless relatively low-tuition, publicly supported colleges are available in the community.
- A large proportion of the public believes that a greater share of the costs of higher education should be borne by the government, although as income and educational levels rise, the proportion favoring tax support decreases. Heads of spending units (the major earner in the spending unit; always the husband in the case of a married couple) who expect to send their children to college are less in favor of increased tax support than those who do not expect to send their children to college.
- Of the families who expressed an opinion on the amount of tax support (75 percent of those asked), 52 percent were in favor of increased support for college students. Of those who expressed an opinion on the direction of tax-support, almost half favored tax support for all students, while the remaining half favored support based on need, ability, or a combination of the two. The costs of a system which gives general assistance to all students are, of course, larger relative to the output in terms of trained manpower than those of one which uses needs, ability, or both as criteria for giving selective aid.

The study, based upon a national sample of 2,800 families taken in 1960, discloses some data on parents' aspirations for the education of their children, their plans for realizing their aspirations, and their

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[1] See James N. Morgan, Martin H. David, Wilbur J. Cohen, and Harvey E. Brazer, *Income and Welfare in the United States* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1962).

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attitudes toward public support for higher education that have important implications for the future demand for higher education.[2]

Parents' Aspirations for Their Children's Education

The study showed that two-thirds of the parents of boys and more than one-half of the parents of girls expect their children to attain some education beyond high school (table 1). Considering the present capacity of colleges, the parents' plans for sending their children to college may be optimistic. However, this comment does not imply that parents' aspirations do not represent a real demand for college education.

Table 1.—Educational expectations for children still in school

Education levels expected	Percentage of heads of spending units expecting given education levels	
	For boys	For girls
0–8 grades	1	0
9–11 grades	1	1
12 grades	23	31
12 grades and nonacademic training	1	4
College:		
Some college	4	6
Bachelor's degree	58	49
Advanced degree	4	1
Do not know; general responses	5	5
Not ascertained	3	3
TOTAL	100	100
Number of spending units in sample	1,128	1,069

A number of different factors including sociological, geographic, economic, and psychological circumstances influence parental planning for children's education. In order to evaluate the effect of these factors, the relationship between 14 selected characteristics of parents and the level of education they aspire to for their children was examined through a multivariate analysis. The relative importance and significance of each of these circumstances are indicated in table 2.

The education of the head of the spending unit is far more important than any of the other variables in determining educational expectations. The educational level expected for both boys and girls rises with the level of education of the head. The fact that the head of the spending unit has attended college has a somewhat greater effect on educational expectations for girls than for boys. It may be that the parents' own college experience tends to give them a greater appreciation of the nonvocational benefits of higher education. In any event, the effect of parents' attendance at college appears to be more nearly equal expectation for the education of boys and girls.

Table 2.—Circumstances affecting parents' educational expectations for children still in school

Circumstances	Rank ordering of importance of factors	
	Boys	Girls
Education of unit head	1	1
Gross disposable income of spending unit	2	4
Difference in education of head and of his wife	3	3
Attitude of head toward hard work and need-achievement score	4	5
Number of living children in family	5	2
Difference in education of head and his father	6	11
Age of head at birth of eldest living child	7	10
Occupation of head	8	6
Ratio of college students in the community to population	9	12
Migration of head from rural to urban community	10	7
Movement of head out of Deep South	11	13
Age of eldest boy or girl 20 or under	12	14
Religious preference and church attendance of head	13	8
Race of head	14	9

The family's current gross disposable income is the second most important determinant of the level of education for boys, but it is considerably less important for girls. After the figures have been adjusted to take other variables into account, they show that parents whose incomes ranged from $1,000 to $1,900 expected a level of education for boys almost one and one-half levels below that which parents with incomes of $15,000 and over expected.

The wife's education is also important in predicting parental aspirations, ranking third in importance for both boys and girls. Where the wife has substantially more education than her husband, expectations for the children's education are higher than his level of education would indicate; where the wife has less

[2] The questionnaire used can be found in appendix B of the study. The results relating to education are contained in chapters 26–29.

education, expectations for the children's education are lower.

Next in importance in predicting parental aspirations is a characteristic termed "attitude toward hard work and need-achievement score." This characteristic represents a measure of the extent to which heads of spending units differentiate in favor of high-status, high-reward occupations and believe that hard work is more important in getting ahead than luck or help from others. In general, a favorable attitude toward hard work and a high need-achievement score has a strong positive influence on educational expectations. After figures have been adjusted to take other characteristics into account, however, they show that unfavorable attitudes toward the importance of hard work and low need-achievement scores seem to have far less effect on parents' aspirations for boys than would otherwise be expected.

The number of living children in the family is an important determinant of parental expectations for educating their children, particularly the girls. While it ranked fifth in importance in predicting educational expectations for boys, it ranked second for girls. Families with one or two children expect a substantially higher level of education for both girls and boys than families having five or more children.

The only remaining factor having a significant statistical relationship to parental expectations for both girls and boys is the difference in education of the head of the spending unit and his father. Heads who had less education than their fathers appear to base their aspirations for their children in part on the experience of their fathers, and to aspire to an educational level for their children that is higher than their own. Heads who achieved more education than their fathers are less likely to expect their children to attain a level of education beyond their own.

The age of the spending unit head at the time the eldest living child was born has some effect on educational aspirations. If the father is under 20 years of age when the first child is born, he may be placed under heavy financial pressure at the outset of the marriage and may, for this reason, make less ambitious plans for the education of his children than his other characteristics would indicate.

The occupation of the spending unit head does not have a great influence on parental plans for the education of boys. Although members of the professions, on the average, expected their sons to reach the level of a college degree, which is higher than the level expected for all boys (college, no degree), most of this difference is accounted for by characteristics such as education of the head or gross disposable income of the spending unit.

There is, however, a statistically significant association between the father's occupation and expected educational attainment for girls. Farmers indicate that they expect about the same level of education for both girls and boys—higher than the average for all girls but less than the average for all boys. Managers indicate that they expect a higher level of education for girls than do members of any other occupation when other characteristics are taken into account.

Although whites and nonwhites appear, on the surface, to have substantially different expectations for educating their sons, the difference appears to be associated with differences in the education, income, and other characteristics of the two groups. In the case of girls, on the other hand, adjustments for income, education, and other characteristics of whites and nonwhites make it clear that nonwhites have higher educational goals for their daughters than the adjusted figures would indicate. Indeed, nonwhites have higher educational expectations for their daughters than for their sons, the reverse of the aspirations of white persons.

Parental Planning and the Financing of Higher Education

The costs of attending college have been rising rapidly in recent years and will probably continue to rise. In the school year 1961–62 the average direct cost of attending college was $1,700 in public institutions and $2,300 in private institutions. In view of the costs of higher education, it is obvious that families with low incomes and low savings are less likely to realize their educational expectations for children than are more prosperous families. However, because the decisions to attend a public rather than a private college and to live at home rather than at the college do to a large extent determine costs of a college education, parents were asked about their plans on both these points. They were also asked about the extent to which they expect their children to support themselves in college.

The choice of public or private colleges is related first of all to income. Among all spending unit

heads who expect their children to go to college, 78 percent expect them to go to public colleges and 22 percent to private colleges (table 3). The proportion of parents who plan to send their children to private colleges is twice as high (30 percent) among those with incomes over $10,000 as among those with incomes under $3,000 (13 percent). A higher proportion of parents in the lower income group gave indefinite answers to this question, indicating a lack of planning and probably also a lack of realism in the educational aspirations for their children.

The choice between public and private colleges is related to religious preference. Roman Catholics who attend church regularly are more likely to expect their children to attend private colleges than members of other religious groups.

Whether public colleges, private colleges, both, or neither, are available in an area affects parents' plans for their children's higher education. In areas containing only public colleges, nine-tenths of the parents expect their children to attend public rather than private colleges. Where there is no college of either kind in the area, the choice is still to a disproportionate extent (85 percent) in favor of the public college. Where there is only a private college or where both private and public colleges exist, the choice still favors the public college, but to a lesser extent.

The study showed that 70 percent of the children whose parents planned to send them to college are expected to attend public colleges and universities. This percentage is considerably higher than the percentage of the total student body presently enrolled in public colleges. (In the fall of 1961, public colleges and universities accounted for 60 percent of the total degree-credit enrollment.) Thus, it appears likely that, along with an increase in the total number of students attending college in the future, public colleges will be expected to accommodate a larger proportion of the total enrollment than in the past.

The study also showed that 61 percent of the children whose parents have definite plans for them to go to college will live away from home while attending college. The choice of living at home or going away to college depends in large part upon the income of the spending unit. Forty percent of heads of spending units with incomes below $5,000 expect all of their children to live at home while attending college as compared to 17 percent of the heads with incomes of $10,000 and over.

The availability of a public or private college in the area also exerts a major influence on the choice of where children will live while at college. Where only public colleges are available in the area, more than half of the spending unit heads expect all of their children to live at home. A local public college offers low tuition and low living costs for the students who live at home. On the other hand, the higher tuition of a private institution near home will offset at least a part of the costs of living away from home in order to attend a public college or university.

Almost 60 percent of parents who plan college for their children expect their children to contribute something to their own support while attending college. Only 3 percent expect their children to finance their college entirely and 15 percent indicated they would not expect their children to contribute anything.

Table 3.—Income levels and choice of public or private college

Range in gross disposable income	Number of heads of family units	Percent of heads planning to send children to college*	Choice of college		Percent of heads with no plans
			Public	Private	
1	2	3	4	5	6
Under $3,000	138	68	87	13	32
$3,000–$4,999	229	76	83	17	24
$5,000–$7,499	355	76	78	22	24
$7,500–$9,999	217	80	75	25	20
$10,000 and over	169	77	70	30	23

*Figures in columns 4 and 5 add to 100 percent of figures in column 3. Figures in columns 3 and 6 add to 100 percent of figures in column 2.

Income, savings, and the number of children in the family are clearly associated with the extent to which parents expect children to support themselves in college. The higher the family income, the less a parent expects his children to contribute to their college support. It is not surprising that over half of those with incomes over $10,000 expect the children to contribute little or nothing to their own college expenses. It is surprising, however, that 22 percent of the families with incomes below $3,000 expressed the same expectation. It may be that some of these families had temporarily low incomes in 1959 because of illness, unemployment, business losses, or other causes and were basing their expectations on their normal income levels. Or it may be that the responses represent less realistic aspirations of the lower income families.

Ability to support children in college depends on both income and the number of children in the family. Among families with incomes below $10,000, the extent to which children are expected to contribute toward the cost of their college education increases with the size of the family. For those with incomes of $10,000 and more, the size of the family does not have a substantial influence on the question of self-support.

Family savings are also related to the extent to which children will be expected to support themselves in college. Families with savings of more than $5,000 are less likely to expect their children to support themselves in college than families with less savings. About half of the families in the survey who planned to send their children to college volunteered information about sources of funds to finance their children's education. Savings and other assets were the most frequently mentioned sources; insurance and current income also accounted for a substantial number of responses.

Attitudes Toward Public Support of Higher Education

With prospects for increasing college enrollments and a higher percentage of applications for enrollment in public colleges, it is relevant to examine the attitude of the American people toward public support of higher education. In order to determine the views of spending unit heads on whether or not tax support for colleges should be increased, they were asked the following question: "Part of the costs of college is now paid for out of tax funds and part by college students and their parents. Do you think that tax funds should cover more of the cost than they do now, or less, or what?"

One-fourth of all spending unit heads could not answer this question, probably indicating lack of forethought or failure to understand the question. Of those answering, 52 percent said that tax funds should cover a larger part of the costs of higher education; 30 percent that they should stay as they are; and 18 percent that tax funds should cover a smaller proportion of costs than they do now. As income increases, the proportion favoring more tax support declines and the proportion favoring the existing level of support increases. Rising levels of education and occupation have a similar effect on attitudes toward tax support for colleges.

Attitudes toward tax support for colleges are also influenced by the current level of public support for higher education in the State or region in which the respondent resides. People tend to favor increased tax support in regions where existing support is comparatively low. The role of publicly controlled institutions is, in general, much larger in the North Central region and in the West than in the Northeast and South. Thus, almost 60 percent of the heads of spending units in the South and Northeast favored higher tax support for colleges, compared with only 46 percent for the North Central States and the West.

On the question of public aid for college students, all spending unit heads were asked: "Should tax money be used to support only those with ability, only those who have financial need, or should everyone be supported?" Almost half of the spending unit heads favored the use of tax funds to support all college students, without regard to financial need or ability. Roughly equal proportions of the other half favored granting assistance on the basis of need, or ability, or a combination of the two.

Parents with children aged 20 and under are somewhat more likely than others to favor aiding all students or needy students. Parents who plan to send their children to college are more likely to mention ability, alone or in combination with need; whereas parents who do not plan college for their children mention need more often. However, both groups are predominantly in favor of aid to everyone.

As income rises, ability is mentioned more often, need less often. Only in the income group $10,000 and above was there a sizable group (7 percent) who

preferred that no one be assisted. The proportion of parents favoring aid for everyone increases with the size of the family.

Significant geographical differences in attitudes toward public aid for college students were apparent in the South and Northeast. A much larger proportion of respondents in the Northeast than in other regions expresses the view that ability should be taken into account. Only one-third of the respondents in the Northeast believe that assistance should be extended to all students, compared to nearly one-half in other regions.

Respondents in the South mentioned need more frequently and ability less frequently than respondents in other areas. The combination of characteristics found in the population of the South—low average income, a comparatively low level of tax funds for education, the dominant religious preferences of the population, and a large proportion of nonwhites—may explain the responses of this region.

It may be rather surprising to some persons that a large proportion of all respondents favored public aid for all students. It may be that this response appeared more often because it requires less thought than selection of a criterion for assistance, such as need or ability. Also, if the phrasing of the question had been reversed, with "everyone" appearing first, and ability last, a different set of responses might have been obtained. Nevertheless, the fact that there was no very strong sentiment that tax funds should be used to support only those college students who demonstrate need or ability may indicate a lack of public sympathy for selective scholarships as opposed to a general subsidy for all students. Further research would be desirable to illuminate this aspect.

Educational Attainment, Past and Future

The Survey Research Center study also analyzed the forces that influenced the education of children who had already finished their schooling and the education of the heads themselves. The analysis revealed a similarity between the factors that influenced the educational attainment of the children already through school and of the previous generation and the characteristics that shape parents' aspirations for the education of children still in school. Although these analyses provide a useful basis for projections of future trends in educational attainment, there remains the crucial question of the extent to which people's attitudes, plans, and aspirations are likely to change in the future.

There appear to be three ways in which educational achievement will be increased in the future. First, as the educational attainment of each generation increases, that generation tends to see to it that its children get still more education. Second, factors other than the parents' education affect the education provided, and these factors, for children, may also change. Third, and most difficult to project, the general level of people's concern with education and the realization of its importance may grow so that parents in all situations will tend to be more concerned with their children's education. People are generally aware of the personal economic advantage of more education. Some are becoming aware of the national needs for trained personnel. Ultimately, perhaps, the cultural, social, and humanistic advantages of education may be more widely appreciated.

It is clear from the close relationship between the education of one generation and the education of the next in the same family that there is some perpetuation of poverty through low relative educational levels just as there is perpetuation of high status through continuation of high levels of education. As more and more people finish high school and go to college, though, these differences become narrowed and their importance decreases.

Policy Implications

The college-age population (18–21 years of age), which now numbers over 10 million, will increase to 14.2 million in 1970 and to between 16 and 17 million in 1980. It is estimated that college enrollment will double between 1960 and 1970, assuming that college attendance rates continue to rise as they have risen during the decade 1950–60. Increased enrollments will place heavy financial burdens on our institutions of higher education in the form of increased outlays for physical plant and for staff. Private colleges, and, to a lesser degree, publicly supported colleges will pass on some of the increased costs in the form of higher tuition and fees. Rising enrollments will call for higher levels of tax support for public colleges and universities.

The implication of the Survey Research Center study is that future demand and need for greater public support of higher education will be substantial.

Current levels of tax support for higher education will not permit the education in public college of all of the children for whom parents expressed such aspirations. Since current public opinion is not strongly in favor of increased taxes to support higher education, it is clear that when the children in question reach college age, the voters will either have to support the necessary public expenditures, revise their expectations about their children's education, or provide substantially more direct financial support for the education than they are currently planning to provide.

The ability to plan ahead is an important factor in the realization of parents' aspirations for their children's education. In order for children to obtain an education beyond high school, parents must make realistic plans and implement them, in part, by more nearly adequate savings. Those whose incomes are barely sufficient to meet their budgetary needs find it difficult to plan ahead and to save, although this is the group that has the most need for advance planning. Clearly, there is a circular causation between low incomes, lack of planning, and low educational attainment. It is to be hoped that this cycle may be broken by awakening greater public appreciation of the importance of higher education coupled with a willingness on the part of all citizens to share in its costs.

The sharply rising costs of college education constitute a barrier for many students of ability. One-half of the Nation's high school graduates do not go on to college. Among this group are many students of high potential who are unable to continue their education because of lack of finances. The Nation can ill afford the loss that is represented by the failure of these students to develop the full potential of their brainpower. This waste will continue unless measures are taken to insure that the benefits of higher education are made available to all talented students, regardless of their means. A program of Federal scholarships is one step toward that goal; increased tax support for public colleges and universities is another; aid in the construction of academic facilities for public and private institutions is still another.

Education is the leavening by which the economic and cultural level of a nation is raised. Because investment in the education of the Nation's youth is in the interest of every citizen, it is reasonable for all citizens to share in the costs. The willingness of the public to support a policy of increased tax support for higher education depends upon their recognition of the value of higher education and of the importance of removing financial barriers that prevent talented young people from getting a college education.

President Kennedy Proclaims National Cultural Center Week

PRESIDENT KENNEDY has proclaimed the period from November 26th through December 2, 1962, as National Cultural Center Week. The week will be highlighted on November 29th with a nationwide, closed-circuit telecast planned to raise funds for the National Cultural Center in Washington, D.C.

Entitled "An American Pageant of the Arts," the telecast is designed to display the contributions of each of the Nation's regions to our national cultural heritage; it will be shown in approximately 100 cities across the Nation and is expected to reach over a million viewers. The telecast will be shown at six universities in the Washington, D.C., area in addition to a downtown theater.

Communities participating in the fund-raising telecast will retain one-half of the proceeds to support local cultural activities, and the other half will go toward support of the construction of the Center in Washington. The structure, to cost approximately $30 million, was designed by Edward Durell Stone.

The Congress, which authorized plans for the project in 1958, donated a 13-acre tract by the Potomac River as the site for the Center, which will provide facilities for the presentation of classical and contemporary music, drama, opera, dance, poetry, and other performing arts.

Funds for the construction of the Center are to come from donations. The telecast is only one of the projects planned to raise money for this purpose. Other fund-raising projects will be addressed to communities throughout the country.

Contributions, which are tax-deductible, may be sent directly to the National Cultural Center, 718 Jackson Place NW., Washington 6, D.C.